Authenticity and Fluency for Effective Storytelling in Business

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Neurobiology: We’re Hard-Wired
(J. Hsu, “The Secrets of Storytelling,” Scientific American Mind, August/September 2008, p. 50)
“The soliloquies were not just about the routines of her day; she seemed drawn to the unexpected, to things that had surprised her or caught her attention. So intent was she in getting her stories right that we came to believe her progress was driven by some sort of narrative energy.” Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. 

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Teaches Without Preaching

“\textit{A story can soften a prescription. I can conceal how strongly I feel about an action one of my clients or staffers wants to take by telling a story with a moral. I don’t say ‘Don’t do it. It’s stupid. Are you out of your mind?’ Instead I tell a story.}”

Ron Culp, Partner at Ketchum
Makes Case for Strategic Direction
Supports Culture Efforts

- “Stories because employees every day have a chance to do great work, to do things that contribute value; some will and some won’t. Communication should inspire employees to make decisions to drive value.” Senior corporate communication executive

- “You need to immerse new hires in company stories.” Senior PR expert

- “To tell a story about company history is to engage people in a kind of tribal memory.” Senior corporate communication executive
Supports the Corporate or Product Brands

- Dow: “The Human Element”

- Chevron: “Human Energy”

- GE: “Imagination at Work”
Explains Difficult Concepts

- Imagination “breakthrough”
- Capitalism as a soap opera
Storytelling Framework

Authenticity

Build Trust
Inform, Persuade, Inspire

Crafting the Story
Working with Technology

Engaging Emotions and Intellect

Fluency in

Specific Business Objectives

General Business Objectives

Capabilities

Foundation

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Authentic: Tell the Truth

- Credible, realistic, tangible, intended to be truthful, and proven by action

- “The greatest vulnerability of stories is inconsistency and breaking a promise if the story is about what your company is and how it acts in the world: ‘once a liar, always a liar.’” Harvey W. Greisman, MasterCard

- “Facts are the ballast—they give stability—and the constraint or burden. You can’t create facts or scenes to help you with the storyline. We who deal with real life can’t make up scenes.” Karen Everett, Documentary filmmaker
Companion Piece to Data or Incorporates Data

- “There’s no disconnect between story and data. There’s a need to give specific factual information (e.g., what margins on earnings per share). Tell the story about how you got to the number.” Senior corporate communication executive

- Provide fact sheet alongside a video clip
Fluent: Engages Emotions and Intellect

Motivates —

“If you can’t translate your passion, you’re hard pressed to be a good leader. No one followed a committee into battle.” Irv Miller, senior corporate communication executive, Toyota
Fluent: Engages Emotions and Intellect

- “A great story is one that the listener can relate to, uses language that makes sense, brings in emotion, makes it visual, takes us on a journey, brings together intellect and emotion.” Perry Yeatman, Senior Vice President of Kraft Foods

- A psychological “sea change” or shift in attention
“Good stories take the world we’ve seen and turn it on its head. They don’t use stereotypes. A character I created for . . . is a Black nerd. In one episode he has to go against bad guys on an inner city playground. That’s the initial premise of the story. I said, ‘Let’s have him go against three girls, not three boys.’” Fred Rubin, Emmy-award TV writer and producer and faculty member, UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television
Fluent: Craft
Memorable Details
“Imagine that my mother is blind. If she’s listening to your story on NPR, you don’t want to be routine and monotonous: I did this and she did that. Imagine, instead, a canvas. Do you want to fill it with black-and-white stick figures or use every color of the palette so that she can really see?” Jeff Hunt, Principal and Founder, PulsePoint Group
Dark Side: Fluency that intentionally masks the truth —

- Snake-oil salesman

- Disney’s Kaa in the “Jungle Book” “Trust in me. . . Shut your eyes and trust in me.”